LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

LITERACY THROUGH LEADERSHIP

OUTLINING AN ADULT LITERACY STRATEGY FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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November 30, 2006

To the Honourable
Legislative Assembly of the
Province of British Columbia

Honourable Members:

I have the honour to present herewith the Report of the Select Standing Committee on Education.

The Report covers the work of the Committee in regard to its inquiry into specific strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy and to improve literacy rates among aboriginal people, adults who speak English as a second language, and seniors.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

John Nuraney, MLA
Chair

2007-01493/

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Composition of the Committee

Members

John Nuraney, MLA	Chair	Burnaby-Willingdon
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Committee Researchers

Josie Schofield, Research Analyst

Mary Storzer, Committee Researcher

Emily Yearwood-Lee, Committee Researcher

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

On February 20, 2006, the Legislative Assembly agreed that the Select Standing Committee on Education be struck to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy and, in particular, to conduct consultations to consider:

1. Successful strategies from other jurisdictions on the promotion of adult literacy.

2. Specific strategies to improve literacy rates among aboriginal people, English-as-a-Second-Language adults, and seniors.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Education, the Committee shall be empowered:

(a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
(b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned and during any sitting of the House;
(c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
(d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee,

and shall report to the House no later than November 30, 2006, to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.

COMMITTEE PROCESS

As all-party parliamentary committees in British Columbia are appointed on a sessional basis, the Select Standing Committee on Education conducted its inquiry into adult literacy strategies during the first two sessions of the 38th Parliament. The committee membership was appointed originally on September 19, 2005 and then reappointed with the same terms of reference on February 22, 2006. To carry out its mandate, 18 meetings and two subcommittee meetings were held (see Appendix A).

During the second session, there was a change in the committee membership. On September 19, 2006, three opposition MLAs (David Cubberley, Rob Fleming and Norm Macdonald) were named as the substitutions for John Horgan, Gregor Robertson and Diane Thorne. Subsequently, on November 16, Doug Routley, the longest-serving opposition Member was elected Deputy Chair.

Earlier, on March 20, 2006, Members had the opportunity to meet directly with a delegation from the Committee on Education, Youth and Sport, Parliament of the Free State of Bavaria, Federal Republic of Germany. One topic of mutual interest was how to integrate students with low-level language skills and/or different cultural or ethnic backgrounds into the education system.

With regard to formal consultations, the Education Committee decided to hear first from people who are knowledgeable about adult literacy strategies used in other jurisdictions. The briefings from 11 expert witnesses took place between March 22 and September 28, 2006 in Victoria and Vancouver.

The Education Committee also organized a series of six public hearings to gather public input on ways to improve the province's literacy rates for the general adult population, aboriginal people, adults speaking English as a second language, and seniors. Advertisements were placed in all the province's major daily and ethnic newspapers, inviting British Columbians to present their ideas at one of the scheduled public hearings, or to send in a written submission by October 23, 2006. For the first time, people were also offered the option of using a toll-free telephone mailbox to submit their ideas. To publicize the consultation process, the Chair took part in three radio interviews during the July 21-24 period.

The first two public hearings were held on the lower mainland (June 5). In the fall, the Education Committee travelled to different regions of the province, holding hearings in Prince Rupert and Prince George (October 4), Castlegar (October 5) and Langford (October 20). To notify people of these regional hearings, ads were placed and news bulletins sent to the free community newspapers.

In total, the Education Committee heard oral presentations from 62 witnesses — including the 11 experts — and received 75 written submissions. The participants represented the broad spectrum of interests within the literacy community: ranging from provincial organizations representing key educational stakeholders, to local literacy groups and individual adult learners. A complete list of witnesses who participated in the consultations is provided in Appendix B and Appendix C.

Minutes and transcripts of committee meetings, as well as a copy of this report, are available on the Legislative Assembly website at: www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/education.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2001, enhancing literacy, particularly programs aimed at preschool children, has been a priority of the provincial government. It is also a personal cause of the Premier, Hon. Gordon Campbell, who has set up his own website to promote the love of reading. At the start of his second term in office, the Premier appointed the province's first minister for early learning and literacy, assigning this portfolio to Hon. Shirley Bond, Minister of Education. Under his leadership, the issue has acquired a much higher profile, as the following summary shows:

- Premier's Literacy Summit – The Premier hosted the province's first literacy summit, which was held in Vancouver on November 3, 2004. The event was attended by about 130 literacy educators and representatives from the federal, provincial and municipal governments.
- Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy – Also, on November 3, 2004, the Premier appointed a 12-member advisory panel representing various sectors (industry, non-profit literacy organizations and local government). Its mandate was to assess the nature and scope of literacy challenges in BC, and to develop recommendations to address literacy priorities.

  The panel's interim report, *Literacy and Lifelong Learning in B.C.: A Legacy of Leadership* (February 2005) recommended developing action plans for specific age groups, (i.e. children, youth, adults). It also called for the provincial government to "ramp up" leadership on literacy issues and to create a framework of outcomes and strategies for literacy and lifelong learning. It recommended outcome-based accountabilities, inter-ministerial cooperation, increasing investment and engaging public support.

  The panel's final report, *Literacy and Lifelong Learning in B.C.: A Legacy of Leadership* (April 2006), endorsed the government's response to the interim report and then laid out its priorities for literacy action, including a call for "immediate and strong provincial leadership, action and momentum" to meet BC's goal to become the most literate jurisdiction in North America by 2010.
- Creation of Literacy Now – This not-for-profit organization was established in the spring of 2004, as part of the expanded mandate of 2010 Legacies Now, to provide leadership and support for community-based planning on the literacy file.
- Increased funding – Since September 2001, the provincial government has invested, or announced, about $54 million in literacy funding, including $4.72 million for adult literacy programs.

The first Throne Speech of the 38th Parliament contained further evidence of the rapid rise of literacy on the provincial policy agenda. The government announced that the first of its five great goals for the next decade is to become the best-educated and most literate jurisdiction in North America by 2010. It also announced that the Education Committee would be asked to focus on the specific challenge of adult literacy to help British Columbia meet its first goal.

Subsequently, on November 24, 2005, the House instructed the Committee to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy, and to consider specific strategies to improve literacy rates among aboriginal people, English-as-a second-language adults, and seniors.

DEFINING AND MEASURING ADULT LITERACY

Since the government's far-reaching goal is a comparative one, the Education Committee decided to define literacy so that it can be measured in a clear and consistent way. However, this task turned out to be more difficult than anticipated for two reasons. First, there is no consensus in the field on the definition of literacy. For example, one key finding of Literacy BC's province-wide consultation, conducted in 2000, is that the meaning of literacy and learning varies according to the context: "Each individual and each constituency group sees it differently — from the standpoint of their own situation and interests."[1]

Secondly, with the growth of the knowledge-based economy, the concept of what it means to be literate has broadened dramatically. Mastery of the traditional 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) is no longer the sole criterion of literacy. Instead, there is a variety of new applied "literacies" — eco-literacy, emotional literacy and financial literacy, to name just a few topical ones. Faced with an ever-expanding range of new "literacies," all of us could qualify as illiterate in some areas. More importantly, for our purposes, it is difficult to know how to begin to measure some of them.

FUNCTIONAL CONCEPT OF LITERACY

For the purposes of this report, the Committee has opted to focus on functional literacy, a concept that is amenable to measurement and simple to understand. This concept links a person's capacity to read, write and do math with their ability to function in everyday life and to participate fully in the modern economy and society. Within the BC context, these core skills require more than a rudimentary knowledge of the English language. Of course, in some of the other jurisdictions within Canada, the capacity to speak French would be the benchmark for language literacy.

The importance of functional literacy cannot be overstated since it is the prerequisite for further learning. Lacking the capacity to read, write and do math, a person at any stage of life will have difficulty absorbing and understanding text-based information. These literacy and numeracy skills are usually acquired during childhood. However, some adults, for a variety of reasons, are ill-prepared to cope with the information demands of everyday life.

Functional literacy is also a subset of lifelong learning, a process that focuses on the opportunities available throughout one's lifetime to attain and maintain the set of core literacy skills and to pursue further education. The newer concept of lifecycles learning, though, has more relevance for our inquiry into adult literacy as it focuses on the spinoff benefits of improving parents' or adult caregivers' skills. In fact, one international consultant in adult education is calling for a shift towards thinking about education policy in terms of multiple life cycles, an intergenerational approach to learning that recognizes explicitly the effects of adult education on children's educational achievement.[2]

MEASURING FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

Measuring literacy has been a controversial issue in the past due to the lack of agreement over the definition. Up until the 1990s, Statistics Canada and UNESCO used the grade-level approach, selecting eight years of schooling as the criterion of literacy. This traditional measure, however, fell

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[1] Stacy Huget, *The Big Picture Up Close: Literacy and Learning in BC.* Vancouver: Literacy BC, 2002, p. 18.
[2] Tom Sticht, "The 'Hard Data' for Increasing Investments in Adult Literacy Education: Moving from a One Life Cycle to a Multiple Life Cycles Education Policy," Media Release, October 5, 2006.

into disfavour with the development of a "real-life" measurement of literacy, an approach pioneered in the United States in 1973 and then copied in Australia and Britain.[3]

1987 SOUTHAM SURVEY

In Canada, a special literacy survey commissioned by Southam News in 1987 represented the first attempt to measure functional or "real-life" literacy, defining it simply as the ability to use printed and written information to function in society. Using this definition, the survey disclosed that five million Canadians could not read, write or use numbers well enough to meet the literacy demands of society at that time, and that one-third of them were high school graduates. Other key survey findings were that functional illiteracy among adults increased from west to east, rising from a low of 17 percent in British Columbia to a high of 44 percent in Newfoundland.[4]

1994 AND 2003 INTERNATIONAL SURVEYS

More sophisticated measurement of Canada's adult literacy rates in relation to other countries has also taken place during the past 12 years. Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have conducted two international surveys: — one in 1994, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), and the other in 2003, the International Adult Literacy and (Life) Skills Survey (IALSS).

The IALSS was designed to measure literacy proficiency from the point of view of a developed country, and to look at how adults understand and use printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community. For the individual, literacy is defined as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."[5]

The 2003 international survey used four domains (prose, document, numeracy, and problem-solving) to measure literacy skills at five levels. Level 3 (276-325 points) is considered to be a suitable minimum level for coping with the increasing demands of today's knowledge-based economy and society. So people with low literacy proficiency are scoring under the benchmark of 276.

The first results of the 2003 international survey pertaining to Canada were released in May 2005. The key findings of the *Learning a Living* report on the national picture were:

- Canada ranked in the middle of the pack on all literacy measures, when its performance was compared with the six other countries participating in the 2003 survey (the United States, Switzerland, Norway, Italy, Bermuda, and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon)
- Canadians performed slightly better than adults in the United States on all measures. Both Canada and the U.S. were ahead of the State of Nuevo Leon on prose and document scales (the only two measures used to assess Mexico's performance)
- 20 percent of adult Canadians (16 and older) had difficulty comprehending any printed material (level 1), and an additional 28 percent could read only simple material (level 2) and so faced challenges coping with the demands of everyday life and work

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[3] Peter Calami, *Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate: A Special Southam Survey.* Toronto: Southam Communications, 1987, p. 13.
[4] Ibid, p. 7.
[5] Statistics Canada, *Building on Our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada, p. 198.

- Overall, the results showed no change from 1994, when 22 percent of adult Canadians had literacy skills at level 1, and 26 percent at level 2

The IALSS provincial and territorial data were released on November 9, 2005. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan ranked second, with the Yukon having the highest level of prose literacy. The data also showed a slight improvement in the reading skills of adults in BC from 1994 to 2003.

SUMMARY

The evidence cited above has established that Canada outperformed the other two North American jurisdictions participating in the 2003 international survey of adult literacy skills — the United States and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon.

Therefore the challenge for the provincial government to attain its goal is a manageable one. By 2010, the year when the next international survey will be conducted, BC will have to match, if not, exceed the performance of the Yukon Territory.

BC Demographic Profile

For the purposes of our inquiry, the Committee decided to find out more about the demographic profile of the four target groups identified in our terms of reference — the province's adult population, aboriginal people, adults speaking English as a second language (ESL), and seniors.

The first opportunity arose on June 21, 2006, when some committee members and research staff attended a Literacy BC-sponsored presentation on the implications of the 2003 international survey results for Canadian jurisdictions. The keynote speaker was Dr. Satya Brink, the Director of National Policy Research at Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). After reporting back on her compelling presentation, the Education Committee decided at its August 2 meeting to invite Dr. Brink to make a formal presentation on September 28.

The content of Dr. Brink's testimony included extra analysis of the 2003 IALSS data, including some tables that had never been presented before. The stated purpose of her presentation was to give the Committee the kinds of evidence they could use to make decisions that will lead to the best results for British Columbians — in particular, "to help make those dollars that BC is investing actually count, and to give information that can make BC perform to its potential." While the numbers speak for themselves, the Committee has decided to include Dr. Brink's insightful assessment of the implications (in italicized text) for the government to consider.

2003 IALSS Results

Target Groups

The demographic information of importance for the province from the IALSS results includes:

- size of BC population (4.3 million), working-age population (3 million), seniors (500,000)
- immigrants comprise 25 percent of the BC population; about 3 million people speak English; and French speakers are less than 1 percent
- About 1 million people in BC speak neither English nor French as their mother tongue
- 2001 census data shows that about 53 percent of the population (15 and over) have some kind of post-secondary education, which helps the BC economy. However, 25 percent (representing 886,000 people) do not have a high school credential, which is a lower proportion compared to other provinces

Literacy Proficiency

During the course of telling "a story through statistics," Dr. Brink confirmed the importance of literacy proficiency for further learning and employment opportunities:

> *"People confuse literacy with education. They're not the same thing. Literacy is a foundation. We have a person in HRSDC who describes it as Velcro. The more Velcro you have, the more education sticks to you.... So literacy is what allows you to understand the world around you and to absorb future information in work and in education."*
>
> *"What we're trying to measure here...is how people use printed information in all the things they do as adults. So it is not about whether they can read or not; it's about how well they read. It is so important to look at how well they read relative to the kind of outcomes they have, particularly in the labour market."*

Dr. Brink then presented the 2003 IALSS results examining how proficient British Columbians were in the different component skills:

- Proficiency varied across the four domains and population age in British Columbia. For printed matter (prose and document), BC was above level 3, which is a good score.
- However, the average numeracy score for the population 16 and older was below level 3. *"This score of 272 has implications, particularly for seniors, when you give them instructions about how to apply for benefits (e.g. OAS), or how to take medications. It also has implications for adults interested in gardening who may be mixing up pesticides."*
- BC's working-age population (16-65) had average scores at level 3 in document literacy, prose literacy and in numeracy, with the Yukon having the highest scores.
- However, as in every other province, BC does worse in numeracy than in prose and document literacy (see Table 1).

"The lower scores in numeracy have "huge" implications for the education system (e.g. they reflect how high school students perform in math and science, how many undergraduates take science), and they also have an impact on service delivery (most programs focus on literacy, not numeracy)."

"These numeracy scores also mean a lot in the context of the knowledge economy. The OECD has pointed out that Canada is lower than the other developed countries, particularly in education in the hard sciences and mathematics. The roots are here in the numeracy scores."

Table 1: Scores in prose literacy, document literacy and in numeracy, 2003

Province or Territory	Prose Literacy	Document Literacy	Numeracy
Newfoundland and Labrador	271	269	257
Prince Edward Island	282	281	269
Nova Scotia	286	284	272
New Brunswick	273	270	262
Quebec	275	273	269
Ontario	279	279	270
Manitoba	283	283	271
Saskatchewan	294	294	284
Alberta	289	290	281
British Columbia	288	290	279
Nunavut	232	234	220
Northwest Territories	280	280	269
Yukon	296	294	283

LITERACY AND NUMERACY PERFORMANCE OF WORKING-AGE POPULATION

- In British Columbia, 35 percent of the working-age population (16-65) had average prose literacy proficiency below level 3.
- The proportion of BC residents at level 3 or above increased by 9 percent (from 65 to 74%) when only people with English and/or French mother tongue were considered.
  "This puts BC ahead of Canada, other provinces and territories in literacy proficiency. However, what this also means is that the BC economy is not benefiting fully from those highly skilled immigrants who lack English language skills."
- 400,000 people in the working-age population (14 percent) were at level 1 and 600,000 (21 percent) were at level 2. The combined total of 1 million represented one-third of the BC working-age population.
  "What is the impact of low literacy proficiency on the economy and on taxpayers? It's like having an economy with four cylinders, with only three operating the way they should. Also, programs for improving reading skills of people at level 2 are less easy to find than those that focus on very poor readers. So if something isn't done soon, the people at level 2 will tumble into level 1."
- BC's performance was even worse for numeracy. Among the working-age population, there were 1,233,000 people (44 percent) who had low numeracy skills.
  "If BC wants to free up money, consider offering short programs for people who are just missing it by a little (762,000 in level 2) to ensure that they retain what they know. For very poor performers (471,000), a three-week course will not fix the problem. Why not? Some of the people at level 1 require a health-based, therapeutic approach, as their learning problems are not detected early enough for remedial or special needs learning."
- At each level of education, the scores of British Columbians (16 and over) were higher than Canadian averages in prose literacy, but below those of Saskatchewan and the Yukon.
  "It is possible for BC to do much better and to reduce the proportion of youth with low literacy scores (37 percent) coming into entry-level positions. The key to increasing the level of literacy in the working-age population is prevention: keep kids in school and make sure they get the foundation skills and then retain those skills by using them. If you don't teach the foundation skills in the first 12 years, then you end up paying twice by trying to get adults to obtain a high school equivalency."
- In BC, as in most provinces and territories, more than 60 percent of youth (aged 16 to 25) had prose literacy proficiency at level 3 or above.
- In Canada, prose literacy scores declined with age because people start losing their literacy skills when they leave the labour force. In BC, the decline was more gradual because scores were generally higher than the Canadian averages in every age group.
- In BC, the number of people (16-65) with low literacy proficiency increased by 0.1 million (100,000) from 1994 to 2003.
  "Since this increase occurred in level 2, if you don't invest in programming to bump them up to level 3, they might be at risk of falling down into level 1."
- Of the 391,000 people (16-65) at level 1 in prose literacy in BC, 64 percent were immigrants (many employed in precarious jobs where they are not using their literacy skills); 46 percent were employed; 45 percent had less than high school; and 64 percent spoke a non-official language.

"It is important to give immigrants English-language training as soon as they arrive because if they have to wait for ESL classes and to get a job, they lose both their literacy and human capital skills."

- Of the 590,000 people (16-65) at level 2 in prose literacy in BC, 32 percent were immigrants; 67 percent were employed; 28 percent had less than high school; and 38 percent had completed high school. Many level 2 people were poor readers and English-speaking, whereas at level 1, they were mostly non-English speakers.

DISTRIBUTION OF LITERACY AND NUMERACY PERFORMANCE IN BC LABOUR FORCE

- In BC, employed people had a higher average prose score (297) than employed Canadians (286).
  "Without good literacy skills, it's very hard to get work, since the majority of jobs in the BC economy require level 3 scores."
- The 366,000 British Columbians (16-65) with low prose literacy were concentrated among certain industries: trade, finance, real estate and leasing (144,000); manufacturing (83,000); accommodation and food services (48,000); construction (47,000); health care and social assistance (44,000).
  "These are the numbers in the BC economy with low literacy — in these five sectors. Don't think it's only the private sector. This is the public sector too. I don't know whether you would like vulnerable people in your province to be receiving services from somebody who has low literacy. In fact, if you target these five sectors of the workplace, you can reach two-thirds of the people with low literacy and hence make a difference."
- All industrial sectors in British Columbia had at least 45 percent of their workers with proficiency levels above level 3 in numeracy, with BC the leader in Canada in knowledge-intensive, market-service activities (public sector).
  "If you are going to keep your lead in the knowledge-intensive areas, if you want to grow your economy, literacy is something that you've got to worry about."

LITERACY PERFORMANCE OF IMMIGRANTS OF WORKING AGE

- A significantly higher proportion of immigrants (16-65) had low literacy compared to their Canadian-born counterparts, and the proportion did not vary by their length of stay in Canada.
  "This shows that the integration services for newcomers are not paying off."
- One-fifth of Canadians (16 and over) are immigrants. Of these 5.4 million immigrants, approximately 1 million (19 percent) reside in BC. The proportion of immigrants in the working-age population (16-65) was higher in BC (29 percent) than in Canada (21 percent).
- Immigrants tend to score significantly lower than their Canadian-born counterparts in both prose literacy and numeracy. Among the working-age population (16-65), the average prose score for Canadian-born British Columbians was 300, and for immigrants 258 — a difference of 42 points. The proportion was similar for numeracy.
  "These immigrants could be contributing more to the BC economy but they are being held back by poor language skills."

- Proportionally, more immigrants were below level 3 in prose literacy than Canadian-born. In BC, one-third (34 percent) of immigrants (16 and over) scored at level 1 in prose literacy, while only one in ten Canadian-born was at this level. Among the working-age population, 31 percent of immigrants were at level 1, compared to only 7 percent of Canadian-born.
- In BC, one-third (35 percent) of immigrants (16 and over) scored at level 1 in numeracy, while only 16 percent of Canadian-born was at this level. In BC's working-age population, 31 percent of immigrants were at level 1, compared to only 11 percent of Canadian-born.
- Of the 1 million immigrants aged 16 and over in BC, 750,000 immigrants did not have one of the official languages as their mother tongue. Among the working-age population (16-65), 77 percent did not have English or French as their mother tongue.
- Among the 800,000 immigrants in BC (16-65), almost half of them (49 percent) were born in Asia, a higher proportion than in Canada (32 percent). Of these, half spoke Chinese languages and 15 percent spoke Punjabi.
- In BC, 63 percent of immigrants were employed, compared to 74 percent of Canadian-born. Fewer immigrants were working as the economy requires level 3 literacy and numeracy skills.
- Among the working-age British Columbians (16-65), 8 percent of immigrants were unemployed, which is about the same for Canadian-born (9 percent).

LITERACY PERFORMANCE OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

- Of the 700,000 aboriginal people aged 16 and over in Canada, approximately 150,000 (21 percent) resided in BC.
- The proportion of aboriginals in the working-age population of BC was higher (5 percent) than the proportion in Canada (3 percent).
- Aboriginal people (16-65) tended to score significantly lower than non-aboriginal people in both prose literacy (259) and numeracy (242). They were performing at level 2, whereas non-aboriginal people (16-65) had better scores in prose literacy (290) and numeracy (281).
- In BC, a lower proportion of aboriginal people were employed (62 percent), compared to non-aboriginals (71 percent), due to the lower literacy rates.
- Among working-age British Columbians, 15 percent of aboriginals were unemployed, compared to 9 percent of non-aboriginals.
- A higher proportion of aboriginal people have low literacy than non-aboriginals. Among working-age British Columbians, 56 percent of aboriginals had literacy scores below level 3, compared to 34 percent of non-aboriginals – a difference of 22 percent.
  "What our findings show is that if aboriginal people get the foundation skills —the "Velcro" score of 276, they score as well as anybody else. If they don't have the literacy skills and the knowledge they need to function in jobs when they graduate from high school, training is not going to fix their problem. Why not? Only 20 percent of Canadians with the lowest literacy scores (level 1) get any training at all, since employers are unwilling to invest in people who lack literacy skills, whereas 40-plus percent of the level 2 group participate in training. So give them the literacy skills as soon as you can because that makes the biggest difference."

LOCATIONS OF PEOPLE WITH LOW LITERACY PROFICIENCY

- Working-age British Columbians at levels 1 and 2 in prose literacy were clustered in Vancouver (Burnaby, East Vancouver, and New Westminster), Victoria, Kelowna, Prince George and Dawson Creek.
  "In these areas, you can run courses. But if you don't have a big concentration of people with low literacy levels, you can deliver programs via the workplace, which can make a big difference."

DR. BRINK'S CONCLUSIONS

- *"Gains in literacy proficiency could be achieved by first targeting people with a mother tongue other than English or French. If you can do something for the integration of immigrants, BC can gain something like 45 points. Next, if you do something about the 25 percent of the population who do not graduate from high school, you can make a difference."*
- *"A thorough program review is needed, because the content focuses on very poor readers (grammar, spelling) but level 2 readers just need more correction (sentence construction)."*
- *"Programs also need to be offered to people where they are, and peer-to-peer learning is better for adults. People who don't have good literacy skills often hated high school and so they don't want to go back to school, and they don't like taking tests. So if you present information in a way that is absorbable and relevant, related to the work they're doing or their passions, people will learn."*
- *"For adults, particularly immigrants, the workplace is the best venue for literacy training (ref. the UK where training is given to new immigrants at work and in relationship to what they know). Most employers, big or small, want to provide training that is very job-related (ref. mine safety procedures)."*
- *"As the costs of literacy are really high in terms of safety, productivity and everything else, we need to find ways in which the different sectors of society can really work together. You can't leave it to government, or the private sector, or the NGOs."*

SUMMARY

The 2003 international survey results indicated that about one million British Columbians of working age (16-65) had low literacy levels that prevented them from understanding and using basic information (e.g. news stories and instruction manuals). Low levels of literacy directly impact a person's ability to improve their quality of life, earn sufficient income, partner in their children's education, and participate in leisure and recreational pursuits.

At the end of her presentation, Dr. Brink posed, in effect, a key question for the Education Committee — namely, what have other jurisdictions done to develop cross-sectoral collaboration and to promote adult literacy?

LESSONS FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Besides Dr. Brink, the Education Committee received briefings from ten other expert witnesses who are knowledgeable about successful strategies, or promising approaches, used in other jurisdictions to promote adult literacy. Since their individual testimony is available in the transcripts of Education Committee meetings on our website, the remainder of this section is a thematic summary of the lessons learned from other jurisdictions. This summary is organized around the four target groups identified in our mandate. The expert witnesses, by area of specialization, were:

- Dr. Ron Faris, internationally known expert on lifelong learning with particular interests in early learning, learning communities and adult literacy
- Barry Brooks, formerly the senior official who planned and delivered England's national *Skills for Life* strategy
- Dr. Kjell Rubenson, expert on European approaches to adult literacy
- Audrey Thomas, researcher and long-time practitioner involved in the Canadian field of adult literacy
- Dr. Glen Farrell, expert on the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the development of literacy
- Dr. Frank Wood, U.S. expert in neurology with an interest in how people learn to read
- Dr. Adrian Blunt, expert on essential skills and workplace learning in the context of the First Nations' approach to literacy
- Dr. John Martin, expert on sustainable rural communities in Australia
- Dr. Graham Hingangaroa Smith, prominent Maori education activist
- Dr. Irv Rootman, expert in the area of health research, with an interest in the link between the literacy of older adults and health

GENERAL ADULT POPULATION

From several experts, we learned some important lessons:

A CROSS-SECTORAL STRATEGY WORKS BEST

Dr. Ron Faris:

"The purpose of using lifelong learning as a planning and analytical tool is in order to promote collaboration of the five sectors of the community: the civic elected sector; the economic, all the way from private through to social enterprise; the public sector of libraries, museums, social and health agencies; the voluntary sector; and the education sector. In other words, all five sectors are harnessed and mobilized, because all five sectors have people who have knowledge and skills worth sharing.

"This learning-communities model may be of use to you. It's the infusion of learning strategies within the policy and practice of every one of the sectors so that there can be joined-up approaches to adult literacy provision and outcomes that are more sustainable. The success determinants are clear. From the British research, and our experience in British Columbia, learning how to build

partnerships of all five sectors, learning how to foster participation of all people — not just those who are well-educated — and learning how to assess progress are key success determinants.

"One recommendation I have is that the provincial government should create an infrastructure that includes a literacy secretariat, because I believe you've got to take a whole-of-government strategy towards this. There are many ministries besides Education and Advanced Education that have an impact at the community level in terms of literacy provision

"Further, I believe there should be — in terms of the interministry committee, which I now believe exists — a requisite citizens' advisory committee to advise that committee, to be a test bed in terms of ideas and whatever and to have that very positive synergy.

"Finally, in terms of policy commitments, I think there should be a literacy adult guarantee. That is, regardless of provider — whether it be the school board or a college or an NGO, a non-governmental organization — there should be an assurance that the instructors or the volunteers have some adult education training, that the curriculum be an adult curriculum and that the materials be adult-oriented. That is not the case in British Columbia now.

It's remarkable that in this century we still do not ensure this. If this were a committee on early childhood education, you would take it for granted that the instructors would know something about early childhood education. That is not the case in terms of adults, and I plead to you to strongly find out what is in fact going on there. What we must emphasize is the need of the learner, not the need of the provider — all right?

There should be a literacy workforce strategy. When you explore the working conditions of literacy workers, whether they be at a school board or a college or an NGO, you are going to find an underclass that is unbelievable: short-term, three-to-six-month contracts; many without any training or further assurance of any continuing professional development; burned out within three to five years.

"Finally, we've got to expand the very positive Literacy Now initiative, which is working along with Literacy BC in some 45 communities. What we are looking at here is a model of embedding literacy within learning villages, learning towns and learning communities. I would argue that it is a powerful model in which we are harnessing or mobilizing the full resources of our community for the first time.

Dr. John Martin:

"My recommendation is that there needs to be an institutional framework within which adult literacy can, in fact, be delivered in the province, in the nation of Canada, in the same way that we have an institutional framework that deals with mass education, basic education, and in the same way that we have an institutional framework that deals with health, public safety, firefighting and so on.

"We have to ask ourselves the question: If we believe there's a relationship between these things — between socioeconomic well-being, health, levels of education and prosperity in the community — where is the institutional framework for delivering adult literacy programs, and how do we make that investment, notwithstanding that we don't have the immediate feedback as to the value of that investment? You know, for politicians and policy-makers this is the art of judgment. As politicians, this is where you have to put your hand up at some point in time and say: "We believe this to be true, and therefore, we recommend this investment."

Barry Brooks:

"Hard decisions were taken between 2000 and 2001. The British government put itself on the line. It created a unit to work across departments and was relentless and ruthless. It put in place a national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy, targets that measured that process and identification of resources to deliver and implement the strategy.

"It's critical that you understand that I'm talking about the British government taking a central role, taking leadership, accepting there's a problem and not abdicating responsibility for someone else to deal with it, but actually looking to galvanize all the actors and activities and resources that potentially would be available to make that sort of difference.... Through its determination to demonstrably secure its goals, the government set itself a demanding agenda with clear time lines and with specific milestones that it was prepared to be held accountable for on a daily basis but also regularly at the polls.

"The strategy involved moving away from a supply-driven to a demand-led, learner-focused system. For learners, the biggest thing about the strategy is not the qualifications. It's actually the self-confidence it gives them, because for the first time they've done what they've seen everybody else do throughout their lives. They've joined that ladder. They're on that system. They've moved from the margin to the mainstream.

"The U.K. strategy shows that learning becomes more meaningful and motivational if it is in a context that the employer and the learner can understand. For example, the Train to Gain program gives employers a certain amount of money for on-site training if they will release people during downtime or work time (ref. McDonald's learning lounge website). Labour unions are now talking about skill bargaining during the negotiation process."

Dr. Kjell Rubenson:

"There are ways of combining community and workplace strategies. For example, changing the mode of production in a workplace, let's say in a sawmill, may also create an opportunity for people to use more skills and encourage them to learn.... If one manages to do that, one would actually gain quite a lot because on the one hand, one would gain the motivation for people — they would be engaged. You would also get economic outcomes, so if you could come up with some breathtaking ideas around that, I think it would be most welcome."

"The other thing, of course, is that the civil society — the community — is a very important part. If one needs to base the strategy on a very strong economic argument, one could make an argument that many of the community activities actually teach some of the soft skills that industry is looking for now. So there are ways of combining these."

EARMARKED FUNDING YIELDS THE BEST RESULTS

Dr. Kjell Rubenson:

"The other thing that is clear here is that one needs earmarked funding (i.e. to set aside money for a specific purpose). When the money has gone generally to something that hasn't been very clear in defining that it is for the groups we have defined as target groups, it gets consumed by others. For everyone you want to reach, you get ten of those that you don't need to look after, because they look

after themselves. In that way and to that extent, the link between the recruitment of people with low literacy and public funding is not so clear in the data. But what is very clear in the data is the link between having earmarked public funding and then the extent to which you manage to reach these groups. That's undeniable if you look at many of the European countries on this."

LEARNERS' NEEDS ARE WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT

Audrey Thomas:

"My vision for literacy in BC is that anyone who needs basic literacy skills or wishes to improve any of the cluster of literacy skills — which are now defined as numeracy, reading, writing, computer skills, oral communication, problem-solving, teamwork, etc. — will have a place to go where they will be welcome to continue their learning and that, if possible, they can access that learning through electronic means, which we were beginning to do when I left the ministry. I think that for that to happen, every community in BC should strive to be a literacy-friendly community so that we take away the stigma that makes it difficult for adults to come forward and we make it as easy as possible to diminish the barriers which many adults find."

"Finally, I would just like to say that there has been a lot of good work done in the province, and there's no need to reinvent the wheel, but there may be ways of helping the wheel get a little bigger and move a little more easily."

Dr. Glen Farrell:

"What do I mean by blended learning? I'm talking about the blending of different learning strategies. There's a myth that the use of technology is replacing face-to-face conversation, dialogue and group-based teaching.... What we have with the use of technology is a much greater, larger, sack of tools from which we can select to design the learning opportunities that are particular to the needs of given learners.

"In the case of learning materials, these can be tailored to the needs of specific groups and individuals, developed locally by tutors and learners. In Zambia we taught literacy tutors how to use videocams, digital cameras, audio tapes, etc. at a central learning centre, and they then took this equipment out into communities. They recorded the stories of the elders. They built learning materials around the environment the learners were familiar with, and it was profoundly more successful than the centrally produced Dick-and-Jane-reader kind of model where one size fits all.

"We found that the interest shifted from the provider of opportunities to those of the learners. The most obvious example of this was in India, where they had this three-tiered program and tutors were trained to teach that. We turned it around and said to focus first on what the learners wanted to learn and help them achieve that. Then we found that, yes, they were interested. More than anything else, we found that as people who were trying to enhance their literacy skills mastered the ability to use a computer, their increase in self-esteem was remarkable. They became more active in their community. Many started playing leadership roles.

"The sharing of teacher resources, via on-line content repositories, is perhaps the most important trend in the application of ICT anywhere. Canada is among the leaders in that and BC has staked out a strong leadership position in that as well.... There's a "but" here, though. Its application is limited by the lack of training for program managers and tutors. There is a dearth of learning material. We need to invest in the production of learning materials that are relevant to

people's lives, if we're going to teach them and enhance their literacy skills. And there is still — particularly, I would argue, in the community of literacy workers — an anti-technology bias."

Dr. Frank Wood:

"The motives of adult learners are varied. When we talk to them in our research, they tell us a whole range of reasons far beyond the workplace why they want to read. It's usually because they do have things they want to read. It's often religious texts of all religions. It's often biographies of people they love and respect. But it's also: I want to learn to read so I can read to my children.' Let's not forget that reading per se, irrespective of its economic impact, is a major ingredient in quality of life....

"I've added a comment or two in yellow ink on this slide show that aren't in the handout. I've reinforced the 18 percent genetic risk in point 2 here. It is a secure finding across Canada — which has been a leader in this work — the UK, Germany and the United States that a very substantial reason why learners, either children or adults, don't read is because of genetic variation. Perhaps I should not use the word remediable, but I want to be sure to say that just because it's genetic doesn't mean you can't fix it. In fact, it means you know better how to fix it, if you know its cause....

"Variance in reading skills can be explained by an assessment of phonemic awareness, picture-naming awareness, rapid naming fluency and single word reading. These four skills are very strong predictors of current and future reading ability of children and literacy-challenged adults, and this testing can be accomplished in 15 minutes, with high reliability."

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

CULTURE AND IDENTITY ARE CONDUITS TO LEARNING

Dr. Adrian Blunt:

"Basically, what First Nations people are saying about essential skills is: 'They're not ours; they're yours. If you ask us to acquire these skills, you're asking us to acquire them for your reasons, for your purposes, and they will not be of assistance to us in sustaining our lifestyle.'

"This is a battle around lifestyle that, clearly, many First Nations leaders see themselves as losing. This is why culture, language, is so important. With over 50 percent of First Nations persons having left the reserve, they have voted with their feet, perhaps as a consequence of their experience of poverty and all kinds of other related difficulties in living on reserve. They've voted with their feet to leave that lifestyle. The means by which they have been able to do that is through education and credentialism. So we have an interesting problem.

"I'd just like to leave you with a quotation from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Basically, the commission is saying that our education system and perspectives really don't address the interests of First Nations persons. 'The great majority of work that has been done on literacy for First Nations persons would fall into this area of us having developed a program for them.'"

Dr. Graham Hingangaroa Smith:

"I'm going to talk a little bit about the concept of learning community — it's actually a new idea related to indigenous communities — because that has been a major point of intervention in the strategies in the New Zealand context. That is, it's not a question of attaching education, schooling and learning with individuals but very much of seeing that those individuals belong to communities.... Often there is an integral connection between community and individual in terms of the opportunities — if you like, the life chances of success — in relation to learning.

"How do we develop interventions that reach beyond the individual and also impact the socioeconomic conditions of the community? It's a very big question, and often, when we focus on one particular issue, we forget to address the broader aspects.... And what might be some strategies that allow that whole community to take up the issue of educational intervention positively? Wananga is a tribal university model in New Zealand. We have three of them. I would hold up many elements of that tribal university infrastructure as an intervention potential here in Canada. Innovation, transformation, and political literacy are other key points.

"My summary of key points is that we need multiple strategies in multiple sites. We need to account for language, knowledge and culture (identity) and see them as conduits to learning. We also need to create the contexts where culture and literacy are brought together (e.g. by creating a model school for teachers in on- and off-reserve schools).

"We need to move beyond the pathology around aboriginal underachievement and to speak about the positive elements and get onto the front foot.

"We need to acknowledge the work that's going on in adult literacy, particularly in the lifelong learning idea of the much wider community capacity that's available to us outside of the educational institutions.

"We need to ask publicly funded institutions to account for their underperformance in responding to indigenous needs. That is not happening in this province. I am deeply disturbed. In fact, it would be one of my top recommendations to this committee. We need a mechanism by which we can evaluate public spending to be more fairly distributed to meet some of these issues that are plaguing us outside of the institutional context — the socioeconomic circumstances that disproportionately afflict some of our communities.

"This mechanism could well be a standing committee of the parliament. It could be constituted as a cross party committee on aboriginal education. I think that's a really important thing to think about here in the sense of continuity in terms of strategies. The idea of a standing committee of parliament that would sit, around some principles...and require a report from the ministry on what they're up to — and individual, publicly funded institutions to report on the incremental progress in respect of aboriginal development and what they've been doing."

ESL Adults

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Dr. Frank Wood:

"Something that has proven true in our experience — and, I think, is proving true in the experience of the other institutions in our adult literacy research network in the States — is that often immigrants, English-language learners, actually learn a bit better, or more quickly, than

native English speakers who are literacy challenged. I think you can probably figure out why that is. For some of those immigrants, though certainly not for all, their only obstacle is the English language. They don't have other challenges other than English vocabulary.

"I'm also going to say that we think, across our network, that we've all found that unless you teach both phonology and vocabulary comprehension and unless you do it in a repetitive format, you will not succeed. There's no such thing as teaching literature without teaching someone how to read the literature. Part of that is a mechanical process of learning the sound-symbol relationships, and part of it is extensive practice with the literature itself. This is, I think, my strongest message.

"The big reservation here is that we learned again, all of us, the hard way that no program should be thought of as effective unless tried in a pilot form in a local setting.... The richness of the culture and the diversity of it in this province especially suggests to me the need, first of all, to vet any program by consultation with the local cognoscenti and, secondly, a pilot test to see if it actually works in a given culture.

SENIORS

ACTIVE LEARNING HELPS OLDER PEOPLE

Dr. Kjell Rubenson:

"One of the issues you have in front of you is adult literacy and the older population, which increasingly becomes an issue with demographic changes. It's particularly obvious in the Nordic countries that they have a high participation of older adults. That has to do with the structure of study associations, which are set up almost like a community centre but with a particular learning focus. They offer courses using study-circle methodology and have very good contact with the community."

LITERACY IS VITAL FOR HEALTHY AGEING

Dr. Irv Rootman:

"Sum up, some of the conclusions we can draw from what's actually a limited amount of research are: that literacy among older adults is an issue that needs to be addressed; that BC is in a more fortunate position than most other jurisdictions in Canada to do so; that the provision of opportunities for lifelong learning may be particularly important for maintaining health and cognitive capacity in old age; and that addressing literacy issues may reduce health care costs.

"My key recommendation is to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive provincial literacy strategy with infrastructure and policy commitments, but at the same time adding some elements that might pertain to older adults. Secondly, to do continuing education and learning to prevent the decline of mental faculties and memory, mental fitness programs for people with mild cognitive impairment and early dementia, and education of employees of provincial departments that provide services to older adults regarding these issues.

"Then finally, and for me as a researcher, almost the most important recommendation has to do with evaluation. So many of these things go on — we've got thousands of them across the country — and nobody ever evaluates them. You never know what we've learned from all of it, so I think it's really important to build in evaluation in whatever you do. That goes not just for the seniors initiatives but for other ones you're looking at."

HOMEGROWN PROPOSALS

In addition to the briefings by experts, the Education Committee also consulted with British Columbians, asking them to present their proposals either at a public hearing, or by submitting their ideas by mail or phone. Specifically, we asked for suggestions on ways to improve the province's literacy rates for each of the target groups — the province's general adult population, aboriginal people, adults who speak English-as-a-second-language, and seniors.

The Committee heard over 50 oral presentations and received 74 written submissions, including four via the toll-free telephone mailbox. We received public input from a variety of people involved in the literacy community — ranging from the province's key stakeholders, adult educators and adult learners, librarians, to local-level coordinators of very small community groups. We would like to publicly thank everyone who participated in our public consultations for providing us with such thoughtful ideas to consider in developing an inclusive adult literacy strategy for British Columbians.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES

There are at least eight ministries involved with adult literacy policy and program planning in British Columbia, with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education taking the lead on the adult literacy file.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Ministry of Education oversees the K-to-12 education system in British Columbia — this includes both public schools and independent schools. As well, in line with the government's new priorities following the provincial election in May 2005, the Ministry's mandate was expanded to include responsibility for public libraries, improving literacy rates across all segments of the population, and for early learning, in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Giving the Ministry the lead role for all literacy initiatives is intended to meet the needs of the whole family — from preschoolers to grandparents.

MINISTRY OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

In connection with British Columbia's commitment to be the best educated and most literate jurisdiction on the continent, the Ministry of Advanced Education is also looking for ways to improve and expand adult literacy programs and services throughout the province. These programs include adult literacy programs and services delivered by community agencies in partnership with public post-secondary institutions.

The Committee invited senior officials from the two lead ministries to make oral presentations and requested information from two others (Attorney General, Employment and Income Assistance). For the record, the other four ministries are: Children and Family Development, Community Services, Economic Development, and Health. We also consulted with the Chair of the Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy who was the-then Executive Director of Literacy BC, and also with the Executive Director of Literacy Now.

Here is a thematic summary of the key stakeholders' advice the Committee received:

> *"There's a tremendous amount of excellent work that has been done around literacy and lifelong learning in our province. We just need to build on those assets.... The challenge before the*

government, of course, is to lead the action." (Linda Mitchell, Chair, Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy)

"The Premier's panel has identified a number of things that we think we have to continue to work on that relate to more sustained funding, more coordination between ministries than what we've done in the past. We're going to do that. We're going to work on that." (Dr. Emery Dosdall, Deputy Minister of Education)

"I believe that if there was one single thing the government could do, it would be to support some kind of infrastructure for carrying the work forward in a sustained way and for not looking at year-by-year funding." (Brenda Le Clair, Literacy Now)

"I recommend that government develop a strategy with adequate sustainable funding that has a large community role and a facilitative role by government, and that we report on the results of that on a regular basis so that British Columbians know what's happening." (Paul Goyan, Ministry of Advanced Education)

Adult Educators' Perspectives

In BC, developmental programs for adult learners are offered by 18 publicly funded post-secondary institutions: 12 colleges, three university-colleges, and three publicly-funded institutes, including two with an aboriginal focus. These programs consist of adult basic education (ABE), English-as-a-second-language instruction and adult special education for people with developmental challenges.

In addition, the education services delivered locally through school boards include the Adult Graduation Program that provides tuition-free instruction for all British Columbians working towards the Adult Dogwood diploma. Each of the province's 60 school districts receives funding to provide adult education programs.

During our consultations, the Committee heard from nine publicly-funded colleges, two university-colleges, one institute, six school districts, as well as, several individual schools adult learning centres, aboriginal and private institutions. In addition, several provincial associations also presented their ideas, including: the BC Public Post-secondary Deans and Directors of Developmental Education, the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC, representing more than 10,000 faculty and staff at public and private post-secondary; institutions, the Adult Educators' Provincial Specialists Organization that speaks for some 400 literacy teachers; and the Adult Basic Education Association of BC.

Here is some of the advice we received from adult educators across the province:

"I guess my main point is that the situation is very confusing. We have the Ministry of Education, which is school district courses, and Advanced Ed college courses. The overlap between all of those ministries, plus the child care and the welfare ministries can be very confusing. Then Literacy BC has practitioners around the province. We have many different agencies and workplace literacy. Even with all of those people in the game, we're missing a lot of people.' (Yvonne Chard, Adult Basic Education Association of BC)

"Don't reinvent the wheel; use what is out there in the system and build on it." (Dr. Greg Lee, Capilano College)

"There is the need for consolidation of responsibility across all ministries for developmental programming and for immigrant integration." (John Boraas, BC Public Post-secondary Deans and Directors of Developmental Education)

"We would like to see a cross-ministerial directorate that integrates and builds on natural partnerships. This would allow for the creation of one commonly understood set of best practices and evaluation criteria, avoid overlap and duplication of outcomes measurements, and enable the development of a sustained core funding structure." (Julia Dodge, University College of the Fraser Valley – Abbotsford Campus)

"There is the need to address the precarious working conditions of adult educators based in school districts." (Victor Guenther, Adult Educators' Provincial Specialist Association)

"Adults must have the opportunity to learn in a place where they feel comfortable and which has stable funding — whether it's a community college, or a church, or a community centre." (Vancouver Community College Faculty Association)

"Aboriginal students face unique barriers; it has been demonstrated that these students are less likely to succeed if we fail to incorporate their culture and values into the program." (Leslie Kiehlbauch, Okanagan College)

"Don't tell our organizations how to do things, but outline what is expected." (Sean Kocsis, IIG-All Nations Institute)

"Our holistic program is based in the context of Nuu-chah-nulth values and teachings and could and should be a model for other communities to contextualize to their needs and edu-cultural values." (Jan E. Green, haahuupay'k Adult Education Centre)

"Special needs screening should be ongoing throughout the regular school system and even start in early childhood." (Diane Kirby, Victoria)

Librarians' Perspectives

British Columbia has 238 public library facilities managed and controlled by 70 locally appointed library boards, and many have literacy programs. Almost all the provinces public schools have a library, with approximately 2 percent employing a full-time teacher-librarian.

Over the course of our consultations, the Committee heard about the important role public and school libraries play in literacy. Various organizations submitted their ideas, including the BC Library Trustees' Association, speaking on behalf of 60 library boards and over 650 volunteer library trustees, the BC Library Association representing over 800 members, and the BC Teacher-Librarians' Association, a specialist association of the B.C. Teachers' Federation. We also heard from four public library boards, as well as individual librarians.

Here is a sample of their suggestions:

"The current funding model is short-term and project based. This discourages long-term planning and collaboration. Collaborations are built on trust over time and it takes time to build those solid relationships." (Lawrence Lavender, Inba Kehoe, and Edel Toner-Rogala, BC Library Trustees' Association and BC Library Association)

"We believe that a minimum 3-year timeline for adult literacy projects and programs will provide a much more stable environment for the care and nurture of same, as well as give partners more time to look towards the future sustainability of their partnerships." (Joan Anderson, Vancouver Public Library Board)

"Programming needs to be taken to locations where learners are comfortable; the library is one location, but services brought to locations such as the Food Bank, coffee shops, or other meeting places could help these succeed." (Beth Barlow, Surrey Public Library)

"As a teacher-librarian, I am convinced that school libraries — properly managed and maintained and delivered school libraries — could make a difference to many of those children (having difficulties with literacy) as they move through the school system.... Now, in a good school with a good school library program, that problem can be assessed." (Donald Hamilton, Victoria)

"An important way to support literacy for adults is to provide good school library collections and programs to them when they are students, as they are becoming adults. Unfortunately, there is inequity between school library collections and staffing across the province and, indeed, within some school districts." (Pat Parungao, B.C. Teacher-Librarians' Association)

Adult Learners' Perspectives

Adults seeking to upgrade their literacy skills or acquire their high school graduation diploma have several options in British Columbia. These include enrolling in a school district's adult graduation program, or a developmental education program offered by the public post-secondary institutions, or attending classes offered by community-based literacy groups. During our consultation process, we heard directly from some adult learners and received submissions from some student organizations, including one from the Capilano Students Union that contained 50 handwritten letters from people associated with the college.

Here are some of the suggestions we heard from adult learners:

"Before when I was reading, I would read about seven pages, and there would be about a dozen words that would kind of mess me up all over the place.... Now I've worked up to ten or 20 pages a night, and there are maybe five words that I have trouble with. This school has helped me quite a bit. My computer skills, too, have increased. I wasn't any good on a computer. Now you can put a program in front of me, and I can figure it out. If my reading wasn't as good, I wouldn't be able to do that." (Jeremy Clare, Adult Learner)

"So I believe that education is really important for First Nations people. They should make it more mandatory, because there's going to be a lot of people like me that will be on the streets. Everybody needs education, and it's really important. I don't want them to be like me, and I don't want my grandkids to be like me." (Bonita Wilson, First Nations learner)

"What I'm trying to say is that I'm going to show my children and grandchildren that any time is a good time to learn, no matter how old you are... After 23 years, my goal is to be an early childhood educator, and that's what I'm striving for. No matter how hard a time I have — whether it's transportation, walking through the winter — it doesn't matter because I did that last year." (Flora Abraham, First Nations learner)

"We need a program where we can prove our English and show our ability, such as job training or volunteer placement, and we think this program can be regarded as an extension of ESL teaching." (Paramjeet Uppal and Bo Xiao, ESL students)

"The establishment of beginner-level English courses for new adult immigrants in their own native languages, through their communities, might provide a solution for the problem. Otherwise, the current courses will continue to produce students who are not really functional in English." (Mohammad Fazeli, ESL student)

"I came to Canada three years ago from Kenya, originally from Ethiopia. I speak Amharic… I need babysitting! I started grade 8 in New Westminster for only one week because there is no childcare. So, I have to stay home now… I would like to go to grade 10. I would like to work in residents care. I want to work." (Aliya, ESL Student)

Literacy Practitioners' Perspectives

Community-based literacy organizations play a significant role in literacy and learning at the provincial, regional and local level in BC. In 2000, Literacy BC consulted with 675 people in more than 40 BC communities on literacy and learning.

During the public consultations, the Committee heard from a wide range of community-based organizations that included the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, which is active in 17 communities, and several local women's groups involved with literacy issues such as the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, the Aboriginal Mother Centre Society and the Servants Anonymous Society based in Surrey.

Umbrella-type organizations also presented their ideas. They included the Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable representing 30 participant organizations, and the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, representing 24 Friendship Centres across the province. As well, the Committee heard from the new Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, speaking on behalf of 33 immigrant-serving agencies, and the English Language Services for Adults Network representing 40 service providers.

Here is a sample of what the literacy practitioners had to say:

"Participants in the Literacy Roundtable envision a unification of resources beginning locally connecting all the way to the ministerial level." (Sophie Yendole, Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable)

"We're strong advocates for a unified community approach to serving the literacy needs of our communities. We support integration of community services, community literacy coordinators and building partnerships. As well, we've seen strong evidence to support the continuum of services from family literacy programs to programs designed specifically for adults and seniors." (Jennifer Cliff-Marks, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy-Nakusp)

"Community literacy and learning groups are ready and waiting when an adult literacy learner does in fact come forward for help. With a streamlined system, along with some sustainable funding in place, we will be able to put even more focus on what we really do best: help other adult citizens acquire necessary basic skills so that they too will have a fair chance in our increasingly complex society." (Ruth Derrick, Project Literacy Victoria)

"We want to reduce the gap between the children who are ready for school and those who are not. Early intervention and family literacy is a preventive approach to adult literacy." (Ali Wassing, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy – Nakusp)

We are seeking the support of the BC government to develop a provincial aboriginal family literacy initiative, a coordinated strategy to guide the efforts to address literacy gaps within the urban aboriginal population in BC, and to ensure that investment decisions are informed and effective." (Paul Lacerte, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres)

"Aboriginal women have very distinct needs that must be met in order for them to be able to advance in their education.… The Aboriginal Mother Centre is a place that is like a home away

from home, where people can come in and support each other towards increased confidence, training opportunities and education, and that leads to self-sustainability." (Penny Irons, Aboriginal Mother Centre Society)

"The lack of respect and lack of acknowledgment of the importance of oral tradition and locally relevant material in the formal education system is alienating many learners. Our experience with adults has shown a need to tell their own stories as a starting point to literacy endeavors." (Betty Weaver, Lillooet Learning Communities Society)

"We have to seriously look at the issue of adult ESL and settlement supports to immigrants, because they are our future." (Chris Friesen, Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance)

"We strongly recommend that British Columbia allocate the full federal settlement transfer to the settlement and adaptation program. Currently BC is robbing 'Peter to pay Paul' and Peter is our community-based English-language-services-for-adults system." (Lynn Moran and Timothy Welsh, Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC)

"The learning environment needs to adjust to suit the needs of the learner and not the other way around. There need to be culturally appropriate materials and resources available, and the learning content needs to be relevant." (Rebecca Beuschel, Literacy BC)

"Centering adult literacy services at neighbourhood schools, coordinated with nutrition supports, access to family support services, child care, and public library services is recommended." (Vicki Simmons, Campbell River Community Literacy Association)

"At our agency, we help seniors and other people fill out forms, do their résumés, work their way through the legal jargon in letters or dealing with government officials. So we think a culturally appropriate, non-threatening type of educational resource would be very important. It should not make people feel belittled or lesser for asking for help and services." (Patty Rosvold, North Fraser Metis Association)

Workplace Practitioners' Perspectives

The Education Committee had a limited response from industry in respect to workplace-based literacy programs. We did hear, though, from two major organizations, the B.C. Federation of Labour and the BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council, SkillPlan, the joint labour and management workforce literacy initiative of the construction industry.

"I'm hoping that what this committee will do will be to give us a challenge that we have to meet. If we don't meet this challenge, then we're actually writing the script for hundreds of thousands of people that they're not going to be the kind of people we need them to be to have a sane, safe society. There was some discussion that people aren't going to university because they've got all these great jobs.... I think that's wrong, and I think the reason that people aren't using the services is because they're not available in a way they can use them. I think most people do want to participate, and we have to open those doors again... There really is a lot of opportunity here and a lot of hope, actually — a lot of hope for us that we can collectively make that transition we're in right now." (Jim Sinclair, B.C. Federation of Labour)

"Our economy should not risk losing an experienced work base because they are unable to comply with requirements for certification or safety training due to inadequate literacy skills. Support innovation, innovation means combining forces and thinking outside the box. In this case, the boxes are government ministries and inflexible funding formulas. An important role that

government can provide is forums for discussion. Many literacy providers are unaware of the programs going on elsewhere. The short-term funding cycle is not an effective use of taxpayers' resources and does not build momentum. The construction industry is addressing literacy in a strategic manner, and the long-term commitment of an industry should be welcomed and supported financially by government." (Lynda Fownes, B.C. Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council, SkillPlan)

CONCLUSIONS

The Education Committee believes that it is imperative for all major sectors in British Columbia to step up to the plate, so to speak, if the province is to attain the goal of becoming the most literate jurisdiction in North America by 2010. During the next three years, the senior and local levels of government, the private sector, and the non-profit sector have to lead by example and seek out ways to raise the literacy and numeracy skills of the 1 million people in the province's working-age population who score below the literacy benchmark of 276. From our perspective, cross-sectoral collaboration is an essential ingredient of any adult literacy strategy.

During our deliberations, committee members have wrestled with the issue of additional resource allocation. The questions we considered were: Are British Columbians getting the best bang for the proverbial buck? Or, could government accomplish more through consolidation and more coordination of existing funding?

We have concluded that in order to ensure existing resources for literacy are being used for maximum effect and to obtain better results, there has to be a single secretariat coordinating the activities of the different ministries involved with literacy policy-making and programming. Our suggested mandate for the secretariat is: to oversee government initiatives and to centralize service delivery for maximum effect; to find efficiencies in the existing investment in literacy so that existing funding is directed at helping BC perform to its potential; and to monitor progress made.

Aboriginal People

The Committee is aware that significant developments are occurring in regard to aboriginal education, and we note the proposed devolution of K-to-12 education jurisdiction to band councils, as well as other initiatives in the post-secondary system to improve graduation rates. Recognizing the socioeconomic challenges facing our aboriginal communities, we think that improving the literacy and numeracy skills of aboriginal people must also be a top priority.

ESL Adults

In view of the fact that more than 50 percent of immigrants living in the province are from Asian countries, the Committee thinks it would be wise to put an appropriate share of funding towards developing relevant programs. To assist immigrants to gain employment, we would propose the expansion of English language services for adults with a labour market focus, and job-specific language training in workplace venues. Besides contributing to the provincial economy, the diversity of ESL adults also enriches the cultural and social fabric of our communities.

Seniors

During the consultation process, the Committee received limited input from organizations serving the province's seniors despite efforts to encourage them to participate. One can interpret this as symptomatic of the lack of general awareness of challenges facing older adults with low levels of functional literacy, especially those who are no longer in the workforce. At the same time, the Committee recognizes that the topic of adult literacy may not resonate with this target group, unless it is linked directly to seniors' issues, such as health, income and social supports.

Finally, in the course of developing our recommendations, the Committee has strived to develop a workable blueprint as a guide to future action. We sincerely hope that our recommended adult literacy strategy will assist the government to achieve its goal to make British Columbia the most literate jurisdiction on the continent by 2010.

RECOMMENDATION

The Education Committee recommends that the provincial government give serious consideration to implementing our adult literacy strategy for British Columbians, which is outlined below:

AN ADULT LITERACY STRATEGY FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

STRATEGY'S PRIMARY GOAL:

To make British Columbia the best-educated and most literate jurisdiction on the continent of North America by 2010

The Committee believes that a concerted effort by all sectors is essential to improve adult literacy and numeracy proficiency levels over the next three years. Progress in achieving this goal will be measured in 2010, when the next internationally comparative survey of adult literacy and life skills will be conducted.

For the individual, literacy is the crucial link to personal empowerment, opening doors to educational and employment opportunities and improving personal health and wellbeing. In a broader context, improving the literacy and numeracy skills of the working-age population will have significant benefits for the provincial economy in terms of higher productivity and competitiveness. Society as a whole will also benefit from increased civic engagement and the integration into the mainstream of disadvantaged people living on the margin.

STRATEGY'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Four principles are presented to guide the development and implementation of the new adult literacy strategy:

LEADERSHIP APPROACH

All sectors — senior and local levels of government, the private sector and the non-profit sector — should play a leadership role in promoting adult literacy. Literacy leadership could involve: each branch and level of government leading by example; the private sector seeking ways to address the literacy challenge in the workforce; and the non-profit sector championing the adult literacy cause.

INTEGRATED APPROACH

Second, an integrated approach should be adopted to address the challenges facing British Columbians with low levels of functional literacy. This could involve: more coordination of policies and program funding within the government; more collaboration among institutions (school districts, colleges and public libraries), community-based literacy organizations and key sectors of the provincial economy; and greater federal-provincial cooperation in regard to adult literacy programs to obtain maximum benefit.

LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

Third, a learner-centred approach to adult literacy programming should be a priority since it offers the most potential for reaching disengaged adults with low-level literacy and numeracy skills. This could involve: designing programs that are responsive to individual learners' needs; delivering these custom-tailored services in a variety of settings across the province; encouraging and working with

employers and labour unions to offer workplace literacy programs to workers; and expanding the range of effective e-learning options to provide better access for adult learners.

PREVENTIVE APPROACH

Fourth, since prevention is the long-term solution to the problem of adult literacy, government should take a proactive role in the detection and treatment of learning difficulties. This could involve screening children at an early age, as well as in the K-to-12 system, to identify and assist students with different levels of learning difficulties.

General Adult Population

STRATEGY'S OBJECTIVE:

To improve the literacy and numeracy levels of British Columbia's working-age population over the next three years

STRATEGY'S KEY ELEMENTS

For the 16 to 65 age group, the key elements to consider in putting the recommended strategy into actual practice are:

1: Leading by example so that a culture of learning becomes embedded in all government organizations within the province. Government could play a leadership role by:

1.1 ***Encouraging each branch and level of government to become a learning organization that provides skills upgrading opportunities for all staff***

Many jurisdictions in North America have opted to become learning organizations. By taking the lead in promoting literacy and lifelong learning, the province could become a model for encouraging other sectors of the community to participate in the new strategy.

1.2 ***Making a commitment to promote plain language in all communications materials and information resources provided to the public***

Many adults with low-level skills find it difficult to fill out forms and understand instruction manuals, or to find the information they are seeking on government websites. A government-wide effort to create plain language documents and user-friendly websites would improve access to services for adults with low literacy skills.

2: Enhancing capacity within government and at the community level so that the planning and funding of adult literacy and numeracy services is effective and well coordinated. Government could enhance service delivery capacity by:

2.1 ***Creating a single secretariat to serve as a central coordinating unit within government with overall responsibility for strategy development and implementation, the funding of adult literacy services for each target group, and program evaluation***

The current fragmentation of responsibility for adult literacy services among at least eight ministries is a major impediment to achieving the government's goal to become the most literate jurisdiction in

North America by 2010. The creation of a secretariat would signify that government is serious in its intention to make adult literacy a higher priority.

An important role for the unit would be the coordination of existing funding for adult literacy services. Currently the considerable provincial resources allocated to promoting literacy and lifelong learning, or to addressing the problems associated with low-level skills, are being spent in a relatively unstructured way and not always for the stated purposes. By reviewing the budgets of ministries and other organizations, via an adult literacy lens, the government could use the aggregate expenditure more effectively to achieve better outcomes.

2.2 ***Establishing a streamlined and accountable funding process for literacy groups***

The current funding model of short-term, project-based grants imposes an administrative burden on organizations with a proven track record — whether they are established non-profits, or small grassroots groups. Providing project funding on a three-year rolling basis and establishing guidelines with clear targets and measurable results could assist the province to improve adult literacy rates by 2010. The new funding model would give literacy organizations the confidence to train and retain staff, thus bringing more stability and continuity.

2.3 ***Encouraging a collaborative and coordinated approach at the community level***

More collaboration between service providers — whether they are based in colleges, schools, public libraries, non-profit agencies or workplaces — is needed to utilize the existing knowledge of best practices for reaching the target groups. Examples of promising approaches in this context include colleges partnering with social service agencies to provide outreach services, or with employers to develop literacy programs for their workforce.

More coordination of the planning process is also needed at the community level. As a first step, clarification is needed of the respective roles and relationships between the various regional and community coordinators employed by the community colleges, Literacy BC and Literacy Now. In addition, gaps in adult literacy services need to be identified as priorities of the community-based planning process.

3: Meeting learners' needs so that rates of both enrolment and retention increase significantly. Government could be involved in meeting learners' needs by:

3.1 ***Building on the expertise, structures and partnerships that already exist to offer relevant learning opportunities for adults in a wide variety of settings***

Some elements that comprise good practice need to be strengthened in BC's adult literacy programs. These include: quality literacy and numeracy instruction; welcoming learning environments; adult-oriented materials and approaches to teaching and evaluation; and individual learning paths, which are tools to empower students to take charge of their learning and monitor their own progress. Incorporation of these elements would improve both student retention and attendance.

3.2 ***Developing a professional literacy workforce***

People who work in the adult literacy field are relatively under-resourced in terms of both training and professional development opportunities. The development of a professional literacy workforce would be an important legacy of the new strategy that would improve the quality of adult literacy instruction in the future.

3.3 ***Encouraging and working with employers and labour unions in both the private and public sectors to define their roles and interests in workplace literacy***

Since job-embedded learning is one of the most effective ways of engaging adults, British Columbia needs to become a leader in promoting workplace literacy in all sectors of the provincial economy. This will require outlining the benefits of developing workers' literacy and numeracy skills (e.g. higher productivity, safety enhancement) prior to developing additional programs for workers with low-level skills.

3.4 ***Promoting e-learning as an accessible way for adults to acquire literacy skills***

British Columbia is a leader in e-learning, and the initiatives could be fine-tuned to target more explicitly those adults with few skills who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of learning. The option of computer-assisted learning would also appeal to workers with low-level literacy or numeracy skills who are too busy to attend courses.

4: **Raising awareness** so that the stigma of illiteracy is reduced and participation in adult literacy programs is increased. Government could be involved in raising public and learner awareness by:

4.1 ***Using a range of communication methods and venues to promote the new adult literacy strategy***

Currently there exists a lack of public awareness about the need to address the issue of low-level literacy and numeracy skills among the adult population, as well as a lack of recognition among adult learners themselves about their own skills gaps. For the latter, a media campaign that profiles personal success stories and outlines ways to upgrade skills could result in a significant uptake for adult literacy services over the next three years. Custom-tailored messaging could also take place within workplace venues.

5: **Taking preventive steps** so that the detection of learning difficulties occurs at the earliest stage possible in a child's life. At a minimum, government could take proactive action by:

5.1 Committing resources to identify, via a simple test, children with a low-level learning difficulty who are at risk of becoming adults with low-level literacy skills

Currently there are long waiting lists in the K-to-12 system for the full battery of psycho-educational testing, due to the limited number of qualified professionals available in the province. Using a simple screening test would be a way to identify the level of learning difficulty. This has the potential to reduce the demand and hence the wait time for the full psycho-educational assessment. In-service training could be a cost-effective way to increase the supply of people who are qualified to administer the test.

5.2 ***Adding literacy assessment to the early childhood health screening program that is designed to give every child in British Columbia the best possible start in life***

Early screening and detection of learning difficulties would be more effective than postponing diagnosis and treatment until children get older. Since the benefits of hearing and vision tests are already evident, it is likely that similar benefits could be found by adding literacy assessment for every child under the age of six.

Aboriginal People

STRATEGY'S OBJECTIVE:

To improve significantly the literacy and numeracy levels of British Columbia's aboriginal people over the next three years

STRATEGY'S KEY ELEMENTS

For aboriginal people, the five key elements to consider in putting the recommended strategy into actual practice are:

1: Leading by example, via collaboration, so that non-aboriginal British Columbians learn from First Nations' concepts of a learning culture, especially from the guidance of aboriginal elders in preserving and sharing their rich oral traditions. First Nations' leadership could be involved by:

1.1 ***Partnering with publicly funded institutions — schools, colleges and libraries — to develop culturally relevant in-service training courses and resource materials***
Some of the province's First Nations have signed aboriginal enhancement agreements with the local school district and/or have developed partnerships with the local college or the public library. This type of relationship needs to be encouraged across the province so that the leadership of bands and agencies can access the institutional resources available in their local area.

2: Enhancing capacity of aboriginal governments and urban aboriginal organizations so that the planning and funding of adult literacy and numeracy services is effective and well coordinated. The First Nations' Leadership Council and/or the provincial government could enhance service-delivery capacity by:

2.1 ***Pressing the federal government to follow through on its commitment to close the education gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people***

Up until recently, the fragmentation of responsibility for aboriginal education between the provincial and federal governments has been a major obstacle to the provision of coordinated service delivery. A year ago, at the historic meeting in Kelowna, the Government of Canada, the First Nations' Leadership Council and the Government of British Columbia signed the "Transformative Change Accord." This tripartite agreement lays out a blueprint over a ten-year period to bridge socioeconomic gaps in health care, education and economic development. Negotiations on the funding and development of an aboriginal literacy strategy need to be a priority if progress is to be made in closing the education gap by 2010.

2.2 ***Providing the necessary funding resources through existing agencies, such as the First Nation Technology Council, to develop and deliver technical training so as to lessen the technological divide within First Nations communities***

The First Nations Technology Council is working with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation to bring broadband access to 100 First Nations communities by the end of 2006. The provincial government has also allocated $17 million in the 2006 Budget for computer training and to create computer access centres in First Nations communities. A long-term commitment is

now required if a sustainable technological infrastructure is to be maintained in these and other communities.

2.3 ***Ensuring that community computer lab sites remain open and sustained financially***

Industry Canada's Community Access Program (CAP) provides affordable access to the Internet in places like schools, community centres and libraries for people who might not have computers or Internet access in their homes or workplaces. For many members of First Nations' communities, these sites are the only places where they have access to a computer and can receive training, information and face-to-face support.

3: **Meeting learners' needs** so that rates of both enrolment and retention increase significantly. Government could be involved in meeting adult learners' needs by:

3.1 ***Collaborating with aboriginal educators in the development of holistic literacy programs for adults that are culturally sensitive, grounded in First Nations' principles of community, shared responsibility and cultural appropriateness***

Aboriginal perspectives and values are not typically reflected in the curriculum of educational institutions, or the program content of non-aboriginal literacy groups. Culturally relevant resources are in the process of being designed to respond to aboriginal learners' needs and they could form the basis for model literacy programs.

3.2 ***Developing a coordinated aboriginal family literacy strategy to guide the current efforts to address literacy gaps within the urban aboriginal population of British Columbia, and to ensure that investment decisions are informed and effective***

As both aboriginal cultures and family literacy programs have an intergenerational focus on learning, the new strategy will lay the foundations for cultural and language retention. Potential elements of the strategy include: research to develop an urban aboriginal literacy rate baseline; a provincial conference for information-sharing among aboriginal communities; investment in capacity-building; and a public education campaign.

3.3 ***Providing equitable library access for First Nations' people living on reserves***

There are an estimated 1,880 aboriginal people living on reserves in British Columbia who do not have access to a public library service without payment of a non-resident fee. Other issues relating to providing library service to reserve communities are; inadequate funding, geographical distances, technological difficulties, and the lack of culturally relevant materials and programs. Extending library access to include all First Nations people living on reserves and providing a better public library service to reserve communities could result in an increase in their literacy skills.

4: **Raising awareness** in rural and urban First Nations' communities of the benefits of acquiring literacy and numeracy skills and/or completing high school. First Nations' leadership could be involved in raising learner awareness by:

4.1 ***Developing a plan of action to promote the new adult literacy strategy in aboriginal communities***

Aboriginal people must be able to look at literacy programs and say, "these are *our* programs; they help us to preserve *our* culture and *our* traditions; they allow us to share *our* history with the rest of the world, and to gain other skills to help our communities and the province." Targeted and powerful messaging that profiles personal empowerment stories of First Nations' learners, and

outlines ways to upgrade skills could increase enrolment in culturally relevant courses over the next three years. Promotion of trades training opportunities in the action plan could also help the province to meet the future demand for more skilled workers.

5: **Taking preventive steps** so that aboriginal youth complete grade 12 at either a conventional high school or an alternative educational institution. Government could take proactive action by:

5.1 ***Allocating more resources for First Nations literacy support services within school districts***

More literacy support services for First Nations learners will increase the likelihood that these students will attain their educational goals, thus facilitating capacity-building within aboriginal communities. Identifying the need for services could be addressed through aboriginal education enhancement agreements.

5.2 Creating resources to develop and deliver culturally relevant First Nations-based curricula in both formal and informal learning settings

The introduction of First Nations-based curricula would also increase the likelihood of learners achieving their academic goals. Recently, the province has taken an important step in this direction by developing a new resource guide that seeks to integrate aboriginal content into major subject areas being taught in K-to-10 classes, and to highlight the diversity of aboriginal people in BC. This guide will be made available to all school districts in the province by September 2007. It is planned that the use of this learning resource guide by teachers will be discretionary. Making the aboriginal content mandatory could be an important step towards validating the heritage of aboriginal youth and encouraging better understanding of the diversity and importance of First Nations culture, as well as stimulating the creation of more culturally relevant resource materials in the future.

Adults Speaking English as a Second Language (ESL)

STRATEGY'S OBJECTIVE:

To increase significantly over the next three years the English language capacity of immigrants in the working-age population

STRATEGY'S KEY ELEMENTS

For ESL adults in the 16 to 65 age group, the five key elements to consider in putting the recommended strategy into actual practice are:

1: **Leading by example** so that all sectors involved with the settlement process — government, industry and the community — engage in promoting a culture of learning within their respective organizations. Government could take the initiative by:

1.1 ***Collaborating with key stakeholders in the settlement process to develop the concept of a learning organization and providing resources for its implementation***

It is important that all of the key stakeholders involved in the settlement process link the concept of foundational learning with diversity when developing their respective learning strategies. Engaging leaders in ethnic communities to promote the new adult literacy strategy could be a powerful motivator for immigrants to address their skills gaps.

2: **Enhancing capacity** so that existing government programs and community initiatives for ESL adults of working age are better coordinated. Government could improve coordination by:

2.1 ***Reducing policy barriers in regard to adult ESL services***

Since the bulk of settlement funding is provided by the federal government, jurisdictional policy barriers (e.g. the ELSA program's restrictive eligibility criteria and unrealistic time lines for course completion) also need to be tackled to facilitate smoother service delivery. For provincially funded adult ESL services, reducing gaps and overlaps could bring greater cohesion.

2.2 ***Providing more stable funding to immigrant-serving agencies with a proven track record***

Settlement services for newcomers to Canada are mainly delivered by immigrant-serving agencies that rely heavily on government funding to provide these services. In Vancouver, a handful of large organizations deliver most of the language and settlement services, using a variety of funding sources (federal and provincial governments, community foundations, and revenue from their own interpretation services). Competition among the agencies in an open-bidding process for short-term contracts imposes an administrative burden that could be reduced via a change in funding criteria. Providing funding on a three-year rolling basis, with clear targets and measurable results, could assist the agencies to deliver services more effectively over the next three years.

3: **Meeting learners' needs** so that the skills and talents of immigrants and refugees are not constrained by low-level English-language skills. Government could be involved in meeting the needs of ESL adults by:

3.1 ***Focusing the new federal funding for settlement services on the provision of higher-level English-language instruction throughout the province, and allocating more provincial resources for English-language services with a labour market focus***

Like other provinces (Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec), British Columbia has negotiated its own agreement with the federal government to provide settlement services for newcomers to Canada. Under the terms of the existing agreement, the provincial government uses 52 percent of the federal transfer funds for settlement services, including the provision of basic English-language instruction for adults. The remaining 48 percent is placed in the consolidated general revenue fund and allocated to colleges and institutes for ESL instruction at the intermediate and advanced levels.

On November 10, 2006, the federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announced additional funding of $38.5 million for immigrant settlement in British Columbia for 2006/07 and 2007/08. This money is in addition to the funds already allocated under the existing agreement ($50.6 million and $49.6 million for the respective fiscal years). The province plans to use a portion of the new federal transfer funds to extend the provision of free, higher-level English-language instruction to newcomers throughout the province. By addressing the problem of uneven access to employment-ready language instruction, British Columbia will have the opportunity to become a leader in settlement provision.

The provincial government is also acting independently to address labour market needs. The 2006 Budget allocated additional funding of $5 million for ESL training, allowing new immigrants to move into the workforce more quickly. A commitment to maintain, or even expand, provincial funding for employment-specific language instruction over the next three fiscal years could be a cost-effective way to assist new immigrants.

3.2 ***Encouraging and working with employers and labour unions in both the private and public sectors to provide job-specific language instruction in workplace venues***

Another way to tackle the skills shortage is by encouraging industry and local governments to invest in language training for workers who lack fluency in English —possibly modelled along the lines of the Vancouver Municipal Awareness Language Program. The language proficiency level required for trades training could also be reviewed in order to produce more skilled workers.

3.3 ***Making ESL services available in community venues where immigrants congregate***

One solution for reaching adult immigrants who are not employed in the workforce is to make more English language services available in community centres, schools, and public libraries. For ESL adults in smaller communities, tutor-driven classes and coordinated supports could be offered. Also, drop-in family literacy programs are important pathways for promoting intergenerational learning and improving English-language skills of adult caregivers in a non-formal setting.

4: **Raising awareness** so that the value of both immigration and English-language fluency are recognized by the public and immigrants. Government could promote awareness by:

4.1 ***Mounting a promotional campaign, using the mainstream and ethnic news media, to stress the contributions immigrants make to the economy and society of British Columbia, and to raise awareness among the different immigrant communities of the benefits of acquiring English-language and other skills that allow them to engage fully in community life***

A two-pronged communications plan is needed to raise public awareness of Canadian society's obligation to assist the immigrant population, and to persuade ESL adults to consider addressing their own skills gaps. The tailored messaging could profile personal success stories and outline the different venues for skills upgrading so as to increase enrolment in English-language courses over the next three years.

5: **Taking preventive steps** so that immigrant and refugee children and youth acquire the foundation skills required to function in the province's economy and society. Government could take proactive action by:

5.1 ***Enhancing the capacity of school districts to meet the language and other needs of immigrant and refugee children***

Children of newcomers — some in their early teens — are sometimes placed in age-appropriate classes, even though they may not have had formal schooling in their home country or be literate in their own language. Providing literacy support services and other supports could serve as a bridge to adulthood for second-language learners who arrive in BC in their teenage years.

5.2 ***Supporting leadership training programs for newcomer youth***

The Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, with Vancouver Foundation funding, offers a leadership training program for newcomer youth who then train others to provide peer support. The My Circle Program is designed to support immigrant and refugee youth who are facing challenges integrating into their new lives in Canada, and it could serve as a program model for immigrant-serving agencies in other communities.

SENIORS

STRATEGY'S OBJECTIVE:

To increase the literacy and numeracy skills of seniors by 2010

STRATEGY'S KEY ELEMENTS

For British Columbians aged 65 and over, the five key elements to consider in putting the recommended strategy into actual practice are:

1: Leading by example so that seniors are motivated to acquire and/or maintain the capacity to read, write and do math. This could involve government:

1.1 ***Urging the key stakeholders involved with the provision of seniors' services to consider adopting seniors' literacy as a priority for the next three years, and to promote a culture of learning within their own organizations***

The inability to read, write and do math has an impact on areas typically viewed as within the sphere of seniors' services: community volunteerism, health and wellness, and specific benefits or programs for older adults. Leadership on the part of government and senior citizens' organizations could play a critical role by promoting the importance of literacy and numeracy skills, and by educating their own employees about the challenges faced by seniors with low literacy levels.

1.2 ***Promoting the use of user-friendly information resources and product labels***

Everyday activities, such as taking medicine or using chemical cleaning products, may create unnecessary risks for seniors who have low-level reading skills. Older people may also struggle with tasks, such as filling in application forms for benefits, or filing income tax returns. To assist seniors with low levels of literacy, materials using plain-language text and a larger-than-average font size — whether in print or electronic formats — are needed to take account of seniors' different levels of literacy. Self-help guidelines for personal health care and user-friendly labels, particularly for health products, would also benefit seniors.

2. Enhancing capacity so that the delivery of seniors' services, particularly relating to education, is well coordinated. Enhancing capacity could involve government:

2.1 ***Sponsoring a review of seniors' services to identify what literacy-related resources exist now and where the gaps are***

The challenges facing older British Columbians who struggle with reading, writing and math tend not to be the focus of seniors' service provision. Since seniors' literacy has had a relatively low profile, learning-oriented initiatives on the part of government and the community tend to be disjointed. More program coordination, and gap reduction, could increase literacy levels.

3. Meeting learners' needs so that seniors have the opportunity to engage in learning for the rest of their life. This could involve government:

3.1 ***Assisting with the development of educational programs for older adults in a variety of settings***

The range of program options could include elder colleges, computer classes, conversation classes with ESL learners, student mentorship, and seniors' theatre. Local history projects connecting seniors and students in the K-to-12 system could be another effective way to promote intergenerational learning.

3.2 ***Encouraging and working with industry to recognize the benefits of hiring and/or retaining older workers***

It is estimated that the proportion of seniors (65 and over) in the province's population will continue to increase in coming years. Providing employment opportunities for seniors seeking employment, for whatever reason, could assist in reducing the skills shortage. This will require removing existing policy barriers (e.g. mandatory retirement), creating flexible workplace policies, and changing attitudes towards older workers.

4. Raising awareness so that the learning capacity of seniors is promoted rather than questioned by both the public and seniors themselves. This could involve government:

4.1 ***Developing a communications strategy to promote the contributions and talents of older people and motivate seniors to become more literate and numerate***

Older British Columbians wanting to engage in further learning may be discouraged by their relatives and friends who perceive going back to school as something only younger people do. It is important to use positive role models in the promotional materials to counter the ageist stereotype that older people do not have the same capacity to learn, or to master the use of modern technology, as younger adults.

5. Taking preventive steps so that a culture of lifelong learning becomes embedded in British Columbian society. Government could take proactive action by:

5.1 ***Encouraging people to use the foundation skills they normally acquire in childhood throughout their lives***

The promotion of lifelong learning would encourage adults of any age to acquire and maintain their literacy and numeracy skills on an ongoing basis so that they retain their literacy proficiency throughout their lifetime. For the current generation of seniors, further learning — whether it's learning how to send e-mails, take up a hobby, mentor youth, or improve writing skills — encourages a lifestyle of "active aging," which is essential for health and wellbeing.

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Appendix A: Schedule of Meetings

November 28, 2006	Victoria	Deliberations
November 22, 2006	Victoria	Deliberations
November 16, 2006	Victoria	Deliberations
November 10, 2006	Victoria	Deliberations
October 20, 2006	Langford	Public Hearing
October 5, 2006	Castlegar	Public Hearing
October 4, 2006	Prince George	Public Hearing
October 4, 2006	Prince Rupert	Public Hearing
September 28, 2006	Vancouver	Briefings
August 2, 2006	Victoria	Conference Call
June 5, 2006	Surrey	Public Hearing
June 5, 2006	Burnaby	Public Hearing
May 10, 2006	Victoria	Committee Planning
April 26, 2006	Victoria	Briefings
April 12, 2006	Vancouver	Briefings
April 11, 2006	Vancouver	Briefings
March 22, 2006	Victoria	Briefings
March 2, 2006	Victoria	Organization

APPENDIX B: PUBLIC HEARING WITNESS LIST

Appendix B: Public Hearing Witness List

Aboriginal Mother Centre Society, Penelope Irons, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Aboriginal Mother Centre Society, Grace Tait, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia, Yvonne Chard, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Adult Educators' Provincial Specialist Association, Victor Guenther, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

B.C. Public Post-Secondary Deans and Directors of Developmental Education, John Boraas, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Paul Lacerte, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

BC Federation of Labour, Jim Sinclair, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Dr. Adrian Blunt, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

Dr. Satya Brink, 28-Sep-06 (Vancouver)

Barry Brooks, 28-Sep-06 (Vancouver)

Burnaby School District Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Doreen George, Souad Hage-Hassan, Ben Qui, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Canadian Council on Learning, Health and Learning Knowledge Centre, Robert Aucoin, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, Chris Friesen, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Capilano College, Del Dhammi, Dr. Greg Lee, Diana Twiss, 11-Apr-06 (Vancouver)

Centre for Learning Alternatives, Teresa Saunders, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

City of Victoria, Councillor Helen Hughes, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Jeremy Clare, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

College of New Caledonia, Developmental Education Programs, Dr. Flora Abraham, Terry Neilson, Marcia Timbres, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, Castlegar, Joan Exley, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy, Nakusp, Jennifer Cliff-Marks, Ali Wassing, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

Connie De Melo, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

Douglas College, Ted James, Mardi Joyce, Bob Logelin, Carol St. Jean, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, Shawn Bayes, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Vaughan Evans, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Dr. Ron Faris, 22-Mar-06 (Victoria)

Dr. Glen Farrell, 12-Apr-06 (Vancouver)

Mohammad Fazeli, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC, Dileep Athaide, Phillip Legg, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Ann Godderis, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

Donald Hamilton, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Dr. Graham Hingangaroa Smith, 28-Sep-06 (Vancouver)

IIG - All Nations Institute, Sean Kocsis, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Invergarry Learning Centre, SD No. 36 (Surrey), Virginia Campbell, Lee Weinstein, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Kaien Island Alternate School, Kevin Leach, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Diane Kirby, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Beverley Krieger, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Susan Lakusta, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Learning Difficulties Centre of BC, Sarah Cunningham, Donna Jarvis, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Lheidli T'enneh Band, Joe Gosnell, Jr., 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Literacy BC, Linda Mitchell, 12-Apr-06 (Vancouver)

Literacy BC, New Caledonia Region, Rebecca Beuschel, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Literacy Kitimat, Janette Camazzola, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Literacy Now, Brenda Le Clair, 11-Apr-06 (Vancouver)

Literacy Now - North Coast Region, Beth Davies, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Malaspina University College, Cowichan Campus, Reading and Writing Centre, Joanna Lord, Vicki Noonan, Nora Randall, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Dr. John Martin, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

Donna Miller, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Ministry of Advanced Education, Post Secondary Education Division, Paul Goyan, 22-Mar-06 (Victoria)

Ministry of Education, Achievement and Assessment Development, Monica Pamer, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

Ministry of Education, Deputy Minister, Dr. Emery Dosdall, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

Wai Ng, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Northwest Community College, Adult Special Education, Sharon Jo Scott, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Northwest Community College, Development Education and Career Programs, Lianne Gagnon, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Northwest Community College, ESL, Marie Grinstrand, Guiha Jians, Jeseema John Nixon, Linh Vo, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Evangeline Nyce, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Monty Palmantier, 28-Sep-06 (Vancouver)

Prince George Native Friendship Centre, Frank Siegrist, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Prince George Public Library, Mark Saunders, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Project Literacy Victoria, Ruth Derrick, Lilaine Galway, 26-Apr-06 (Victoria)

Dr. Irv Rootman, 12-Apr-06 (Vancouver)

Dr. Kjell Rubenson, 11-Apr-06 (Vancouver)

Edna Ryan, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Selkirk College, School of Adult Basic Education, Dr. Lyle Olsen, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

Servants Anonymous Society Surrey, Lynda Dickson, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

South Island Learning Community, Lilaine Galway, Alegha van Hanuse, Doug Symington, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Richard Stock, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Support for Dyslexia and Learning Difficulties, Rhonda Henry, Stephanie Lindstrom, Charlene McLean, Gloria Olafson, 04-Oct-06 (Prince George)

Surrey Teachers' Association, Lynda Toews, 05-Jun-06 (Surrey)

Audrey M. Thomas, 22-Mar-06 (Victoria)

University College of the Fraser Valley, Sue Brigden, Julia Dodge, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Paramjeet K. Uppal, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, ABE, Laurie Gould, Stephanie Jewell, Ingrid Kolsteren, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, ESL, Nina Kozakiewicz, Lyn Lennig, 05-Jun-06 (Burnaby)

Victoria READ Society, Claire Rettie, 20-Oct-06 (Langford)

Bonita Wilson, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Dr. Frank Wood, 28-Sep-06 (Vancouver)

Lorraine Woods, 04-Oct-06 (Prince Rupert)

Bo Xiao, 05-Oct-06 (Castlegar)

APPENDIX C: WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Adams Lake Band, Education Department, Donna L. Jules, EC-2006-36

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, Immigrant Integration Coordinating Committee (representing 33 immigrant-serving agencies), Lynn Moran, Timothy Welsh, EC-2006-4

Azure English Language School, Glenn Strange, EC-2006-64

BC Construction Industry Skills Improvement Council, SkillPlan, Lynda Fownes, EC-2006-31

BC Teacher-Librarians Association, Pat Parungao, EC-2006-74

Clare Marie Belanger, EC-2006-6

Blueberry Creek Community School, Bev George, EC-2006-70

British Columbia Library Trustees' Association and British Columbia Library Association, Lawrence Lavender, EC-2006-53

British Columbia Library Trustees' Association and British Columbia Library Association, Inba Kehoe, Edel Toner-Rogala, EC-2006-53

British Columbia Teachers' Federation, Jinny Sims, EC-2006-68

Judy Brooks, EC-2006-2

Virginia Brucker, EC-2006-24

Paul Bruhn, EC-2006-26

Burnaby School District No. 41, Adult and Continuing Education, Don Jacob, EC-2006-62

Calamus Productions, Heldor Schafer, EC-2006-9

Campbell River Community Literacy Association, (Campbell River School Distict No. 72, also representing Continuing Education and the local Literacy Now Planning Committee), Vicki Simmons, EC-2006-17

Canadian Federation of Students - BC Branch, Shamus Reid, EC-2006-71

Capilano Students' Union, Kiersten L. Ballard, EC-2006-57

Central Okanagan School District, International Education, Leanne Bettesworth, EC-2006-12

P. Emmy Chiang, EC-2006-54

Loong-Sheung Chung, EC-2006-63

Dave Clyne, EC-2006-47

College of New Caledonia, Lakes District Campus, Cathy Ashurst, EC-2006-75

Coquitlam School District No. 43, Continuing Education, Nita Jacob, EC-2006-35

Cowichan Adult Learning Centre, Judy Hershman, EC-2006-55

Peter M. Dawson, EC-2006-42

Downtown Eastside Literacy Roundtable, (representing 30 participant organizations), Sophie Yendole, EC-2006-19

Educacentre College, Thomas Godin, EC-2006-7

English Language Services for Adults Network, (representing 40 service providers), Brenda Lohrenz, EC-2006-22

Family Network for Deaf Children, Cecelia Klassen, EC-2006-43

Frank Smith Educational Associates Inc., Mary-Theresa Smith, EC-2006-65

FuturEd Consulting Education Futurists Inc., Dr. Kathryn Chang Barker, EC-2006-56

Richard Georg, EC-2006-41

Gladwin Language Centre, Joan Berndt, EC-2006-5

Al Goguen, EC-2006-46

haahuupay'ak Adult Education Centre, Jan E. Green, EC-2006-29

Hecate Strait Employment Development Society, Janet Hultkrans, EC-2006-18

Sheila Houston, EC-2006-25

Karin Jensen, EC-2006-58

Shelly Johnson, EC-2006-23

Lillooet Area Library Association, Sheila Pfeifer, EC-2006-28

Lillooet Learning Communities Society, Betty Weaver, EC-2006-30

Literacy Now, Leona Gadsby, EC-2006-72

Ian MacLean, EC-2006-67

Malaspina University-College, Adult Basic Education and Literacy Departments, Bronwyn Brown, Marilyn Guttman, EC-2006-49

Wilma McPherson, EC-2006-11

Multicultural Family Centre, (on behalf of a group of African refugee women), Sylvie Kruchten, EC-2006-60

New Westminster School District No. 40, Community Education, Betina Ali, EC-2006-1

North Fraser Metis Association, Patty Rosvold, EC-2006-33

North Island College, Adult Basic Education Development Programs Department, Maggie O'Sullivan, EC-2006-51

North Island College, Office of the President, Dr. Martin Petter, EC-2006-45

Northern Lights College, Christabelle Kux-Kardos, Val Keeler, EC-2006-39

Okanagan College literacy practitioners, (representing 17 Literacy Instructors and Volunteer Tutor Coordinators), Leslie Kiehlbauch, EC-2006-48

Prince George Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society, Kim Stene, EC-2006-20

Prince George Public Library, Allan Wilson, EC-2006-32

Marg Rose, EC-2006-27

Pat Russell, EC-2006-37

Stephanie Sambandam, EC-2006-14

Peggy Shannon, EC-2006-16

Shine a Light on Literacy, Joseph MacLean, EC-2006-59

Christine Smythe, EC-2006-61

Barb Stewart, EC-2006-34

Gordon Stewart, EC-2006-15

Pat Stone, EC-2006-8

Surrey Public Library, Beth Barlow, EC-2006-38

Terrace Volunteer Bureau, Community Readers and Writers Program, Murray George, EC-2006-3

Sandra Trolian, EC-2006-73

Vancouver Community College Faculty Association, Frank Cosco, EC-2006-52

Vancouver Community College, ESL Division, Alison Norman, EC-2006-13

Vancouver Public Library Board, Joan Andersen, EC-2006-44

Leanor Vlug, EC-2006-50

Janet Elaine Wagner, EC-2006-10

Heather Webber, EC-2006-69

Norma-Ann Webster, EC-2006-21

Sheila Whincup, EC-2006-40